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SUBJECT: FEW LEADS ON NEVSKIY EXPRESS BOMBING

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor David Kostelancik; reasons 1.4(d).

11. (SBU) Summary: Over one week after the reported November 27 bombing of the business class Nevskiy Express train from Moscow to St. Petersburg in which 27 people died and almost 100 others were injured, Russian authorities are still searching leads in the case. The neo-Nazi group Combat 18 was the first to take responsibility for the attack, but few gave it much credence. On December 2, Chechen insurgent leader Doku Umarov claimed responsibility for the blast on the rebel Kavkaz Center website, but law enforcement authorities are trying to gauge the validity of the claim, while searching for up to four "northern Caucasus-looking" individuals reportedly spotted in a village near the site several days before the event. Rumors spread quickly that Pavel Kosolapov, an ethnic Russian wahhabist believed to be the mastermind behind the August 2007 attack on the same train, participated in this latest bombing. According to press reports, on December 1 police arrested two Chechens and an Azeri at a location outside of Moscow in connection with the bombing. Russia's chief investigator, Aleksandr Bastrykin, promised President Medvedev answers before the middle of December and during his December 3 Question and Answer session, Prime Minister Putin promised to "break the back" of terrorism and demanded tough action against "criminals who attack their own people." End Summary.

12. (SBU) Russian law enforcement authorities are sifting through various versions of the cause for the November 27 bombing of the Nevskiy Express train. Few believed the initial claim of responsibility by the neo-Nazi group Combat 18. The December 2 claim of responsibility by Chechen rebels under Doku Umarov is more credible, although the Chechen Interior Ministry and Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov questioned the claim, and argued that the group had been so weakened by successful attacks against it within Chechnya and neighboring Ingushetiya that it was not able to mount an action of the scale of the Nevskiy Express event elsewhere in Russia. Commentator Tatyana Stanovaya wrote on politcom.ru that Kadyrov would as a matter of course deny that the bombing was the work of Umarov's group because it would show the Kremlin that he does not have everything under control in Chechnya. The Russian Interior Ministry did not comment on Umarov's statement posted on the rebel "Kavkaz Center" website and representatives reportedly told reporters that Umarov and his gang were prime suspects. The initial blast and a smaller bomb reportedly hidden near a utility pole that exploded the afternoon of November 28 when the investigators had gathered, bore the hallmark of Caucasus insurgents, according to law enforcement authorities. Commentators countered that the second blast was of such a small size that it could have only been meant to scare bystanders. There were no casualties from it, although investigators (including Bastrykin himself) were reportedly in the vicinity when it exploded. Investigators have stated that the second bomb may

have been meant for another training traveling from St. Petersburg.

13. (SBU) Chief among the initial suspects was Pavel Kosolapov, an ethnic Russian who converted to Islam and became an insurgent after serving a tour of duty in the Russian army in Chechnya. Shortly after the incident, rumors began to swirl of four "North Caucasus-looking" individuals (including a woman) who were seen in a nearby village several days before the blast. The head of the village told reporters that the four were Roma, and not from the North Caucasus, although there were claims over the Internet that one of the four was named "Akhmed." Shortly after the incident, passengers on the train reportedly saw three men and a woman wearing orange rail linemen vests who took pictures of the damage, including the crater caused by the blast, and then left the scene in an automobile parked nearby.

14. (C) Several commentators have lent their support to the belief that the attack was carried out by forces from Russia's volatile North Caucasus. Andrey Soldatov, formerly a journalist on security issues with the agentura.ru website, said that, unlike the Kremlin or the White House, the express train was an easy target for the insurgents. Nikolay Petrov from the Carnegie Moscow Center agreed, noting that it was "unprecedented to kill two such high-ranking officials (Boris Yevstratikov, head of the State Reserves Agency, and Sergey Tarasov, chairman of the federal highway system) in a single attack." The death of these two "chinovniki" led others, including politologist Aleksey Mukhin, to suggest that the explosion could have just as easily been the work of contract

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killers.

15. (C) Musa Muradov, the daily Kommersant's primary reporter on the North Caucasus, told us December 2 that there are even reports attributed to those who were first on the scene, that the incident was not caused by a bomb, but merely a derailment that was covered up to appear to resemble the August 2007 bombing. He said that the first journalists on the scene did not notice any crater consistent with a bomb blast in the area to which they were allowed. This could be explained by the fact that while the blast reportedly occurred when the front engine passed over a portion of the rail-line, the last few cars bore the brunt of the damage. The trains from Moscow to St. Petersburg usually consist of at least a dozen cars and stretch several hundred meters in length. A similar report posted on kasparov.ru on December 1 stated that the head of the railway workers' independent trade union believed the incident was caused by a technical malfunction and not by a terrorist act.

16. (C) The independent Novaya Gazeta reported that on December 1, 20-25 masked police arrested two Chechens (Murat Amerkhanov and his younger brother Yunus Amerkhanov) and one Azeri (Zaur Guliyev) in the Moscow suburb of Solnechnogorsk in connection with the Nevskiy Express bombing. According to the article, the three men had lived in the suburb for several years and the older two owned their own businesses. Lawyers for the men stated that the three had been beaten by police in order to get them to admit to the crime. Authorities have since released Guliyev but reportedly still have the Amerkhanov brothers in custody.

Comment

17. (C) Rumors will continue to swirl about the cause for the November 27 bombing of the Nevskiy Express. The case against two Ingush men for their role in the August 2007 bombing is just finishing up in a court in the nearby city of Novgorod. Shortly after the November 27 incident, one of the two reportedly admitted to his role in delivering explosives to Pavel Kosolapov, but there is reason to believe that this confession was made under duress. Their trial has been

suspended until February 2010. Although Russia's chief investigator has promised results from his investigation by mid-December, we believe it unlikely that this case will be solved soon.

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